

Little Sister by alabasterclouds

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Summary:

After watching Stranger Things, I had an incredible need to give Eleven someone who would actually love her and take care of her emotional needs. Joyce and Eleven's interactions gave me a bit of a lightbulb moment, and I decided to write a little fic that has Eleven finally getting what she needs - and Joyce giving some of the endless love she has for her sons to a little girl who really needs it.

Little Sister

They discovered, as best they could, that she was probably younger than Will, by a few months, anyway.

Not that it mattered. Sometimes Joyce called the two her "twins", but more often she spoke of them separately. "My son." "My daughter." And about Jonathan: "My older boy. My rock."

It was strange, at first. The noiseless slide of her feet over the shag carpeting instead of freezing, bare and squeaking on cold linoleum floors. The way she didn't sleep like the rest of them did, and sometimes fell asleep in odd places, like in the corner between the couch and the cabinet, or under the table. She hated the overhead light in her room, and unscrewed it - it reminded her too much of the constant hospital-like glow of the lights in the old place. The bad place.

Eleven refused any medical attention or examination by doctors. She overheard Joyce speaking on the phone to Mike's mother about it. "But I don't even know if she's had all her vaccinations, let alone if she's typical for her age at all. I just want to do right by her. We just don't know anything about her."

And Eleven had cracked a small smile, because if she knew anything, it was that she wasn't typical.

They weren't doing school, yet. Joyce found workbooks and old primers, letters spelled out in garish primary colours and simple math problems. Eleven did them because they were something to do, something "typical", but she preferred to wander around Will's room and pick up toy rocket ships and old mix tapes. Or she'd sneak into Joyce's room when Joyce was in the kitchen, inhale the scent of old cigarettes and Chanel perfume. Sometimes she'd pick up a lipstick. Sometimes she'd touch a finger to the pink or red, rubbing the pad of her fingertip over the smooth, greasy substance, smearing it onto her lip or cheek.

"Pretty," she'd whisper. "Pretty."

Her hair was growing out, a strange tangle of straight and curly, dark brown highlighted with blonde. Joyce would sometimes pin it back with barrettes or elastic bands with clear coloured balls on the ends. And Eleven now had many dresses, all different styles, and some pants and shirts, too. No more hospital gowns. No more cold drafts on her back and legs.

They got a reclining chair because Mike told Will how much Eleven liked his father's. Sometimes Jonathan would steal it and Eleven would make a face at him, Will laughingly encouraging her to move him out herself, but they mostly left it for Eleven to rock back and forth, or to throw herself back, her sudden burst of surprised laughter startling the boys and Eleven herself. She still didn't laugh much. She didn't really know how.

At night, she could hear Joyce in Will's bedroom, holding his hand, promising him that she'd never let him go back there, back to the Upside Down. And Eleven would hear him sniffing, his pleading. "Stay with me, Mommy. Don't leave." The way his voice would break. "Don't let me go."

And at first, she wouldn't cry. She'd learned long ago that crying did absolutely nothing at all. She never remembered anyone picking her up to soothe her in the bad place. If anything, there would be a thump on the door, a harsh hiss. "Shut up." Though, sometimes Papa would come in, and sometimes he would bring her a glass of milk, even though he knew she'd wet the bed and someone would have to bring her new sheets. They all complained, all the white-coats, about how hard it was to take care of her, but she didn't think it was so hard. It wasn't as if she disobeyed a lot. It was worse, her taking care of all of them, the way they *depended* on her so.

She sometimes wet the bed here, shame, shame. It took Joyce two nights before she realized that the strange little girl in the room next to Will's, the room that used to be her ex-husband's office, was hurting as deeply as her little son, maybe more. And Eleven would hear her hesitating in the hallway, the way she'd used to hear the few female researchers in the bad place hesitate outside her door while she cried. Maybe they remembered their own children? Eleven didn't know. She sucked her thumb instead, trying to ignore the wetness, the cold, the way her new pajamas with the flowers on them, so soft, were probably ruined.

And Joyce would push open the door, and creep to the side of Eleven's bed. And she'd hold her arms out for the shivering little girl. It didn't matter that Eleven was Will's age. Joyce soothed her as easily as she would a baby.

"Shh, shh, oh, sweetie. It's okay. It's okay. I'm right here."

Eleven thought she'd hate to be held, feeling so confined - but she would cling to Joyce, burying her face in Joyce's rough-clothed shirt. And Joyce would rub Eleven's back, even dropping a kiss on her tumbled head. "It's okay. We'll clean you up. Oh, you're shivering, you poor thing. It's okay, honey."

And Joyce would find her new pajamas and a warm cloth to clean up with, while she changed Eleven's bed and then settled with her under the covers. Eleven curled into Joyce, breathing in Joyce's scent, feeling her heartbeat and her warmth. And sometimes she'd cry a little more, but only because no one had ever bothered to understand her humanity, seeing her for only what she could produce for them. A spy. An assassin.

Never what she was. Never simply a child.

Joyce saw a child. Joyce saw the way Eleven bolted her food, as if she'd never get to finish - because sometimes they'd snatch it from her before she was finished. Joyce saw how Eleven would hide, how simple things fascinated her, and Joyce was the one who found a Light-Brite, coveted by half the kids in Hawkins, before they put it on the shelf for Christmas that year.

Eleven spelled out things on that Light-Brite long after she was supposed to be asleep, while she waited for Joyce to soothe Will. Thumb in mouth, she placed the toy at the door of her room.

"MAMA. COME HERE."

And Joyce, used to heeding the lights, would smile and push open the door, and take her little girl in her arms.